

VZCZCXRO0914
RR RUEHRN RUEHROV
DE RUEHKM #0083/01 0541339
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 231338Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY KAMPALA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0262
INFO IGAD COLLECTIVE
RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KAMPALA 000083

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/23
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [UG](#)
SUBJECT: UGANDA: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON KING OF BUGANDA

REF: 10 KAMPALA 69; 09 KAMPALA 1044

CLASSIFIED BY: Tim Manarin, Political Officer; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: The leader of Uganda's largest and most powerful ethnic group told the Ambassador on February 18 that Uganda is slipping toward instability. Buganda King Ronald Mutebi II said he is apprehensive about the February 2011 election, and accused President Museveni of trying to dismantle the Buganda Kingdom. The King and his advisors said there are no ongoing negotiations with the government to defuse tensions stemming from the deadly September 2009 riots, and accused Museveni of "persecuting" Buganda in retaliation for the Kingdom's demand for federalism. End Summary.

King Warns of Democratic Backsliding

12. (C) King Mutebi met Ambassador Lanier and PolOff at the King's palace on Banda hill in Kampala. Also present were Buganda's Prime Minister John Baptist Walusimbi, Attorney General Apollo Makubuya, and Deputy Attorney General David Mpanga. The King voiced concern for Uganda's democratic backsliding and urged vigilance to avert what he described as "our worst fears." When the Ambassador asked him to elaborate, Mutebi said public support for Museveni is declining and that Museveni has failed to strengthen the institutions needed to prevent a return to Uganda's violent past.

13. (C) Mutebi described Museveni's refusal to reform the Electoral Commission as a recipe for disaster. The King also noted rising ethnic tensions, and said these tensions were not present a few years ago. Mutebi said there is a widely held perception that the U.S. has given Museveni a pass on democracy in return for Uganda's troop contributions to the African Union Mission to Somalia. He warned that the U.S. may be inadvertently promoting instability by ignoring Museveni's democratic failings. Attorney General Makubuya added that many Ugandans wonder why the U.S. took a tough line with Kenya on democracy but not Uganda. In response, Ambassador Lanier said the building of democracy is the highest priority for the U.S. in Uganda, that the U.S. regards Uganda as one of our closest partners in the region, that we consistently stress the importance of holding peaceful and democratic elections during discussions with Ugandan leaders, and noted the recent congressional reporting requirement for the 2011 elections (ref. A).

¶4. (C) With little progress since the September 2009 riots that left as many as 27 people dead (ref. B), Mutebi said that Buganda was undergoing a kind of "persecution" by the state and emphasized that he was not using the word lightly. He complained that the central government has shown no good will toward Buganda, cannot be trusted, and that no negotiations with Museveni are ongoing. Buganda Prime Minister Walusimbi noted that the Kingdom's dispute goes well beyond the riots and the closure of CBS radio to include issues of land and civic rights. Walusimbi accused Museveni of failing to honor a personal promise in April 2009 to return a particular piece of land to the Kingdom.

¶5. (C) Walusimbi described the closure of CBS radio as the latest step in Museveni's plan to break Buganda's back, and Kingdom of Buganda Attorney General Makubuya complained that the Ugandan government responded to a lawsuit by CBS's 100 employees for wrongful loss of employment with a countersuit seeking damages for the loss of life and property incurred during the September riots. Makubuya said Museveni precipitated the riots by illegally blocking Prime Minister Walusimbi from visiting Kayunga district in

KAMPALA 00000083 002 OF 002

September, and said Buganda has little hope of legal redress due to the steady erosion of the judiciary's independence.

Federalism and the Buganda Voting Bloc

¶6. (C) When the Ambassador asked why Museveni regards the Kingdom as a threat, Mutebi said the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party knows Buganda represents Uganda's largest voting bloc, but that the NRM views Buganda demands for federalism as unacceptable. Mutebi characterized the rapid proliferation of administrative districts as an attempt by Museveni to fracture and weaken larger groupings like Buganda, and scoffed at government claims that redistricting will bring services closer to the people, arguing instead that new districts have only increased patronage jobs and reduced funds trickling down to people at the grassroots.

¶7. (C) Kingdom leaders agreed that Museveni has delivered security and improved economic growth during more than 20 years in power, but insisted that a return to a federal system like the one that existed until 1966 is the only way to fully restore peace and stability in Uganda. Mutebi stressed that Buganda is not advocating for secession from Uganda, but rather a federal system where the national government retains certain overarching responsibilities like defense, foreign affairs, and monetary policy-making. The Prime Minister and Attorney General said that they envision a federal Buganda government as a constitutional monarchy led by a democratically elected parliament.

¶8. (C) Mutebi noted that the Odoki Commission in the mid-1990s found that 65 percent of all Ugandans support federalism, and said the Kingdom made some progress toward convincing non-ethnic Baganda of federalism's value during a December 2009 conference. He said Buganda has always welcomed and integrated non-Baganda so there should be no fear that a Buganda government would impinge on the

rights of other ethnicities living in the kingdom, and added that western Uganda's Bunyoro Kingdom, which wants to benefit from recent oil discoveries, is becoming a convert to federalism.

Comment: Risks for 2011

19. (C) Raised and educated in Britain, Mutebi radiates an air of British royalty. Since the King's infrequent public statements are generally confined to terse, non-political messages, this meeting offered a rare glimpse of the King's personal viewpoints. Buganda's relationship with Museveni and Uganda's political situation is not encouraging, as both Buganda and Museveni appear to be engaged in a high stakes game of chicken, with Buganda refusing to dial back demands for federalism and Museveni determined to chip away at the Kingdom's authority. The standoff has increased the King's popular support among ethnic Baganda - as evidenced by the notable rise in portraits of Buganda royalty being sold by street vendors and displayed in car windows throughout central Uganda. Meanwhile, it will be difficult for Museveni to win central Uganda in 2011 without the King in his corner, and Museveni will be taking a calculated political risk by running for re-election without Buganda's support. Continued animosity between the King and the President, and the subsequent failure to defuse tensions stemming from the deadly September riots, raise the odds for conflict during the presidential election in February 2011.
LANIER